



Driftwood

Fall / Winter 2019

The newsletter of the
Turtle Flambeau Flowage
and Trude Lake
Property Owners'
Association, Inc.

The Times They Are A-Changing (Sort of, and Slowly)

By Mike Hittle

The appointment of a new, full-time Turtle-Flambeau Scenic Waters Area Property Manager, Beth Feind, brings to an end several years of uncertainty about that position; but it does not bring to an end discussion about the future of the Mercer Ranger Station and its personnel. As usual, the rumor mill has been cranking away in high gear, getting some things sort of right, and others pretty darn wrong. Here's a look at two issues that have been discussed both in the news and in conversations around the area: the future of the Ranger Station facility; and the possible transfer of some of its staff to another DNR location.

The replacement of the Mercer Fire Response Ranger Station is a line item in the 2019-2021 State of Wisconsin Capital Budget. It has been budgeted at \$4,012, 900. The new facility would replace the present one, "either at the same location, or elsewhere on the 40 acres, if the current ranger station is not allowed to be destroyed." The project justification notes that the existing facility is 79 years old (it may well be even older than that and might, I suspect, have historic value). It lacks adequate space for existing staff, programmatic activities, and equipment storage and maintenance. It also fails to meet building code and ADA requirements. The proposed schedule for this project is brisk, calling for the final completion in December of 2020. That seems a highly unlikely goal, as the WDNR is "just in the initial stages of planning the project," according to Mike Vogelsang, WDNR fisheries supervisor for northern Wisconsin. Moreover, historical experience suggests it is wise to keep in mind that capital projects of this nature

can be postponed or, worst case scenario, not acted on for whatever reason. By the way, the recent auction of old equipment by the Ranger Station was fully in keeping with a longstanding WDNR practice of getting rid of aging or no longer useful equipment. It was not a harbinger of doom for the station.

The issue of a partial staff move is more complicated and not yet resolved. In May of this year, Steve Gilbert, Natural Resources Region Team Supervisor, confirmed that all fisheries personnel (Zach Lawson, Fisheries Biologist-Senior for Iron and Ashland Counties, and fisheries technicians Jason Folstad and James "Hulio" Zarzycki) working at the Mercer Ranger Station would be reassigned to the WDNR Service Center in Ashland. Though the crowded quarters at the Mercer Ranger Station played some part in the decision to move the staff, other considerations seem to have predominated. First, it is a broad goal of the WDNR to have fisheries biologists on staff at all service centers where they can interact more easily with the public (and in the case of this particular move to interact with various other partners, such as the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission, WDNR forestry and wildlife staff, and faculty at Northland College). Second, the WDNR recently realigned its fisheries units in the north in an effort to make more efficient use of resources in each unit—a policy that should benefit fisheries management in Iron and Ashland Counties. Third, WDNR personnel policy seeks, when possible, to place staff in locations that are as supportive as possible to individuals' personal lives. Such a policy cuts down on the dislocations brought about by frequent moves of staff.

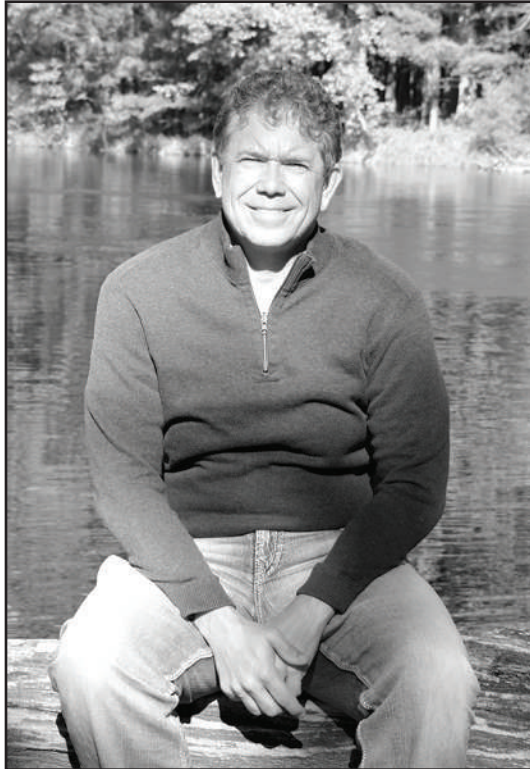
News of this decision was not well received in the Mercer area. As the October 23, 2019, edition of Ironwood's yourdailyglobe.com noted, John Sendra, chair of the Town of Mercer Board of Supervisors, objected strenuously to the projected move. Moving staff from Iron County, which has 494 lakes and 224 miles of streams to Ashland County, which has 84 lakes, he argued, "is like moving pilots to an

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President's Letter

By Randy Schubert



As I prepare this letter, I am sitting by a nice fire wondering where the summer and fall went. It seems like yesterday when we met for our annual meeting in the heart of summer. We elected new directors, and Jeff Wilson made a great presentation on the history of ospreys on the Turtle-Flambeau Flowage. From the committee reports to discussions after the meeting I once again realized how we all share this unique and very powerful bond woven into the Turtle-Flambeau Flowage and Trude Lake. It's awesome to see how everyone comes together to be such great stewards of our "Accidental Jewel," as Mike Hittle so appropriately called it. When taking on the position of association president, I knew there would be challenges in balancing a very busy work schedule with the commitments required by the TFFTL Property Owners' Association. I do have to admit there have been challenges, and at times I have not given the position the time and attention it deserves. However, what continues to ignite my passion are the people I have met and the bond that everyone shares. During board meetings and volunteer projects, I have been privileged to learn from and see first-hand the foundation of this group: its members, directors, committee chairs and past officers who continue to contribute so much. Thank you to everyone who has helped build and sustain the association and position it to continue forward with its mission.

To be more specific I want to thank, first of all, those involved with our social media and communications. Our Facebook page has been very popular and our web page continues to be a great source of information for our

members and non-members alike. I encourage everyone to actively participate in our Facebook page and visit our website. Thank you, Susan Payne, for all the great work on starting and maintaining our Facebook page and thanks to Jeff Malison and Tom Mowbray for all their work related to the web-page. I would also like to recognize Mike and Beth Myers, who will be stepping down from chairing the Water Quality Committee. Over the last few years they have organized volunteers and supervised water testing throughout the flowage and Trude Lake. Finally, thanks to Jim Moore for his past service as a board member and chair of the Water Level Committee. I would also like to welcome and thank Todd Jirous as our new secretary (Todd and his wife Becky have been involved in the association for several years) and Mike Hittle as a new director.

On the invasive species front, Randy Payne and his group continue to search out and find purple loosestrife in addition to keeping an eye out for other invasive threats. They have done an excellent job of eliminating it in some areas and making a strong push to contain it in other areas. There has been discussion about reaching out to upstream lake associations to combine efforts fighting invasive species. I say "excellent job" to Randy and his group.

Fortunately, during the last few years rainfall has been timely and plentiful, so there have been no significant issues with water levels. Nevertheless, our Water Level Committee continues to monitor the situation. Ed Hryciuk is the new chair.

I have been thinking about the future of our association. We currently have very good projects that are benefiting the flowage and Trude Lake. We also need, however, to anticipate future changes that might affect both the TFSWA and the surrounding area. Terry Daulton and I chatted informally about some possible new and exciting projects for the association. We might, for example, play a role in the future of the Mercer Ranger Station. This old structure might, she suggested, become a visitor center whose feature attractions would be the Turtle-Flambeau Flowage and its history, Smokey Bear, the extensive natural history collection now in the station, etc. Such a project might be undertaken in conjunction with other local organizations. Additional projects might involve strengthening connections to lake and river associations upstream and downstream from the flowage and forging partnerships with other organizations, such as the Mercer Chamber of Commerce, and local conservation organizations and clubs.

After thinking about these future-oriented possibilities, I reached out to the new Property Manager for the Turtle-Flambeau Scenic Water Area, Beth Feind. I thought this was a good time to introduce our group to Beth. The interests of the association are clearly in line with the vision that Beth has for the flowage. She has a strong interest in, "making partnerships and collaborating with internal and external entities in preserving the pristine nature of the flowage for



future generations.” Fighting invasive species, assuring native plant protection, and keeping our wildlife and fishery populations healthy are just some of the issues on her agenda.

As I put another log on the fire and reflect on this association, I realize that it is an exciting and challenging moment for our group. We have an opportunity to reaffirm our vision, adjust our goals to meet changing times, and undertake long-term planning on behalf of the TFFTL area.

I want to once again thank all those who contribute and volunteer their time. From all my interactions with members, whether delivering a new TFFTL Association road sign, or meeting folks on Swimmers Island, or presiding at the annual meeting, I truly enjoy being a part of this great organization. I look forward to accomplishing our goals as we serve as stewards of the “Accidental Jewel.”

Show Your Pride

Have you noticed the many colorful *Member of the Turtle-Flambeau Flowage Trude Lake Property Owners' Association* signs displayed all along our roads? They're a spectacular visual for association support. If you haven't yet purchased your membership sign please contact any of the officers or directors of the association at TFFTL.org.

Charismatic Critters: Part Two

By Jenna Malinowski

Moose are solitary animals, generally avoiding other moose throughout most of the year. They live a quiet life, spending their time in remote areas that are not inhabited by most other mammals, including humans. It's not until September that moose become active and seek out other moose, strictly for reproductive purposes.

Moose begin mating in September and often carry on into early October. This is why we see an increase in observations throughout the northern part of the state during these months. Observed bulls tend to be younger (deduced by antler size) and likely originate from Michigan's upper peninsula. Michigan currently estimates their moose population to be increasing with just over 500 animals in the UP. This is great news for moose enthusiasts, who have seen population declines throughout the country.

Locally, observations have increased this year with some in the Butternut, Park Falls, Springstead, Hurley, and the Manitowish River and Pine Lake areas. Mercer had a visitor this summer that made an appearance strolling across HWY 51 near Claire de Loon. And two bulls were captured on a trail camera near Pine Lake. Altogether, nine separate observations have been reported this year, although this does not necessarily indicate nine different individuals.

The cow who frequented the Manitowish/Springstead area over the past five plus years has not been reported this year. This cow gave birth to two bulls in 2017 that were last seen in 2018 near Springstead. Since moose are solitary animals with small home ranges in good territory, it may be that she has gone a year undetected. If luck is on our side, maybe one of the observed Springstead bulls has found her and we'll see calves in the future!

Have a new sighting? Go to DNR.WI.GOV and search “large mammal observation” or call 715-562-0017 to report a sighting. Updates will be provided in the future.



Two bull moose observed on trail camera near Pine Lake.
Photo Credit: Matt Dallman.

Cougars, also known as mountain lions or pumas, have gotten a lot of press in Wisconsin over the past couple of years. Biologists have confirmed cougar observations using tracking techniques, DNA analysis, and photo confirmations by trail cameras, and even home security systems. Cougar observations were not as common decades ago.

In the 1800s, European settlers were generally intolerant of large carnivores such as cougars. Like some other animals in the United States, cougars were extirpated (made locally extinct) from much of their native range. Wisconsin's last confirmed presumed native cougar was shot and killed in 1908. And even though track surveys, deer yard inspections, deer scat surveys and other assessments were being performed annually (some dating back to 1997), it took over a century from that 1908 shot until a cougar was again confirmed in Wisconsin. Confirmed cougar observations are far more frequent than just a few years ago. What changed?

In 1978 South Dakota declared the cougar as a state-
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Hard Water Fishing

By Chad McGrath

Water is one of the few, perhaps the only, substance that expands when frozen. And if it didn't, ice would sink. Those ice cubes in your old fashioned wouldn't float and a lake would freeze from the bottom up, perhaps freezing into a solid block. It's unlikely life as we know it would have developed on Earth. Another thing that wouldn't have developed is ice fishing. Here on the TFF, there would be a cadre of people without their favorite outdoor winter pastime. I'd venture to say that most of us who fish during the summer have tried ice fishing. Many of us didn't get hooked. We may venture out onto a frozen lake once a winter or so, but we just don't hear the siren song of ice fishing. This article's about those who do.



"Hopeful"

Photo by M.J. Slone

Many wonder why subject yourself to what is usually the harsh environment that goes along with sitting on frozen water for hours. From the people I've talked to about it, I've isolated four main motivations: It's a challenge, both catching fish, and just being out there. It's something to do that's outside in the winter. It's social. And finally, it's food. The following quote sort of sums up all four motivations: "Northern pike are low maintenance; the perfect winter fish for kids. Drill a few holes in the ice, put in some tip-ups, sit back and have a cup of coffee, let the kids play, and when a flag goes up, everybody runs. That's good living in a Wisconsin winter." - Terry Margenau, fisheries supervisor stationed in Spooner (from the DNR web site cited below).

Ever wonder how many folks poke holes in the Flowage each winter? It's such a big body of water, with so many nooks and crannies, that just observing from landings or out your lakeside window doesn't tell you much. But a look at the 2016-2017

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Turtle Flambeau Flowage Creel Survey Report gives us the answer. A chart titled "Seasonal Angler Effort Summary" breaks down "Effort" into several measures: Total Angler Hours, and Total Angler Hours/Acre, plus a couple of other categories. Each of these "Effort" measures is then presented to us by month and also broken down into a "Summer Total" and a "Winter Total", with a "Grand Total" of "Angler Hours" at the end. According to the report, in 2016-2017 people fished the TTF for 18,838 hours in the winter, defined as December through March. In summer, defined as May through October, fishermen put in an astounding 171,467 hours fishing the Flowage! (For a month by month breakdown you can access the entire report via the link at the end of this article.)

A couple other interesting bits of information about ice fishing, offered by Zach Lawson, Mercer Fisheries Biologist: Local folks catch more fish, and, on average, more big walleye are caught in January and February than other months. Both facts are revealed by details in the Creel Survey.

As of this writing in early November, there is fishable ice (if you are careful) on the flowage, one of the earliest ice-ups in recent memory. So today there's a group of hardy winter fisher people out there drilling and chipping their way to nirvana, while the rest of us winter lovers await enough snow to slide on. There are so many winter wonders to enjoy. Have fun everyone!

<https://dnr.wi.gov/topic/fishing/documents/icefishing/BGIceFishTips.pdf>

<https://dnr.wi.gov/topic/fishing/documents/icefishing/WEIceFishTips.pdf>

<https://dnr.wi.gov/topic/fishing/documents/icefishing/NPIceFishTips.pdf>

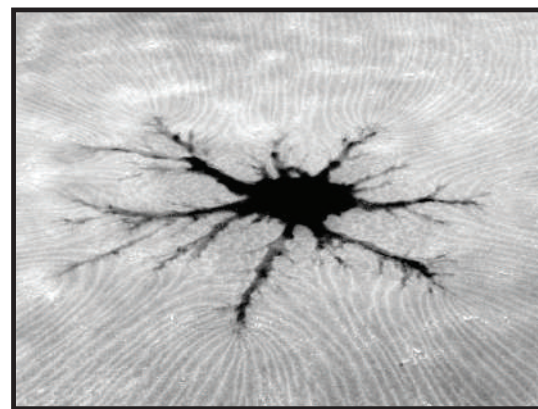
<https://dnr.wi.gov/topic/fishing/documents/north/IronTurtleFlambeauFlowageCreel2016.pdf>



Artful Ice

By Diane Daulton

Here we go again, ice forming – still, anew, again...finally? Many an old-timer has a story or two about the wonders and perils of first ice. Fishermen seek out the moment it can safely support them to try their luck with over-eager walleye. Sometimes cold windless nights lay out silky smooth black ice, so perfect as to allow for the romance of unencumbered skating – a relic of generations past. No matter one's persuasion, ice has many faces: dangerous, beautiful, brittle, tempting, transparent, delicate, deep, light, black, rough, slippery, elastic, and occasionally eerie and otherworldly. This article offers a look at the tip of the iceberg, so to speak, through observations about the art (and some of the science) of ice.



Ice star on a Northern Wisconsin lake.

Photo by Diane Daulton

Most children harbor a fascination with ice from an early age, perhaps soothing them even from before memory. Toddlers and grown-ups alike are drawn in by its multi-faceted properties. Take, for example, the icy top of a frozen mud puddle – transformed overnight into mixed medium...soft curves, beautiful to behold. I wonder, could puddles portend humankind's Achilles' heel, seeing what we value most only after it has been destroyed? You all know to what I refer: the irresistible urge to snap, crackle, and pop its smooth surface. Luckily mud puddles are easily reincarnated, as many a curious boot has tread upon the pretty looking-glass between air and water below.

A couple of years ago a friend and I encountered strange patterns in newly formed ice called ice stars. These interesting formations are associated with liquid water flowing through a hole or crack (sometimes a fishing auger hole) as snow weighs down on newly formed ice. Some resemble stars while others look more like crabs or macabre octopi with dark mysterious arms radiating outward from the center. These star-like formations showcase the flow of liquid water (slush) as it melts its way outward forming arm-like conduits then re-freezing. Sometimes intricate patterning can be observed fanning out from little fingers at the end of the star's arms. Under the right conditions, their elegant striations resemble the downward sweep of weeping willow or a firework on its last legs.

While ice is fascinating from a scientific standpoint, it is actually a pretty cool (pun intended) medium. According to the BBC, "The exact origins of ice sculpting are murky, though we do know that the practice has been around for a very long time. Early Inuits travelling across present-day Alaska, Canada and Greenland started building ice and snow houses for shelter – commonly known today as igloos – around 4,000 years ago." Joseph Amendola's book, *Ice Carving Made Easy*, shares the evolution of ice harvest from the beginnings where highland farmers in China flooded fields to provide ice for food preservation circa 600 B.C. to the precursor of ice cream as upper class people from Rome and India began eating and drinking ice mixed with fruit juices as a lavish dessert. Nowadays, artists worldwide use ice to carve intricate sculptures of anything from dragons to castles, for parties or for huge festivals. The adventurous holiday traveler might choose to visit the Harbin International Ice Snow Sculpture Festival located in far northeastern China...a favorite from dozens of ice and snow sculpture festivals worldwide.

Ice not only conveys art in the traditional sense by showcasing intricate patterns and amazing structures, but it also inspires us in the musical sense. One example is the Ice Music Festival in Geilo, Norway, a "glacial instrument" festival founded by Terje Isungset. It features instruments made from ice ranging from stringed instruments like harps or violins to horns to percussion instruments and chimes. If you want to experience the ice music of Geilo, just type "ice music" in the search box on YouTube. Another insanely cool example of musical ice is a video of drumming on outdoor ice filmed on the world's largest freshwater lake, Lake Baikal in Russia (<http://thekidshouldseethis.com/post/ice-drumming-on-lake-baikal> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hpfo7oNS1XY>). Closer to home, imagine your favorite lake, silent and still, covered by ice, but remember that ice bends and moves on the surface of the water and expands and contracts with temperature fluctuations. Thermal expansion and internal pressure play roles in the formation of cracks that can sometimes result in very eerie sounds. On cold nights when ice is forming, thunderous booming sounds can startle even the most ardent fishermen. Some people liken the sounds of ice forming to whale calls, zinging, or even a Star Wars' blaster.

With the winter solstice soon upon us and plenty of time for candlelight, it would be a mistake to write about "cool" ice phenomenon without mentioning ice luminaries. They are easy to make and fun for the whole family. All you'll need is a five gallon bucket or a handful of balloons with or without food coloring. Build your own ice wall, ice Christmas tree, lighted sidewalk path, or just a single candlelit reminder of the beauty in nature. Enjoy the solstice season and Happy Holidays to all.

Diane is an independent author, naturalist/educator, and lake and stream advocate. She can be reached at ddaulton@centurytel.net.

This article first appeared in *The Bottom Line News*, Dec 2017.

Brett Bockhop Steps Down as Property Manager

By Mike Hittle

When Chris Paulik retired from her position as property manager of the TFSWA, the WDNR asked Brett Bockhop to step in as interim property manager “for a few months” while the WDNR sought to make a permanent appointment. The agency found Brett’s extensive experience—and especially his work as the first Ranger at the Willow Flowage property where he took the lead in developing a master plan—a great match for the job in Mercer. Little did he know, however, when he showed up at the Mercer Ranger Station in November of 2015, that a full four years service lay ahead, owing largely to the agency’s failure to act in filling the position.



Photo by Mike Hittle

By mutual agreement between Brett and the agency, his appointment was part time, but he tackled his responsibilities with full-time energy and commitment. In addition to keeping the inevitable pile of paper moving along, he found time to work on the thorny issue of dock maintenance at the various landings on the flowage. Prior to his arrival on the job, docks had been left in overwinter, only to suffer both cosmetic and structural damage. Under Brett’s guidance, the agency pulled all docks in the fall of 2018, had the damaged ones repaired, and reinstalled them in the spring of this year. Henceforth, all docks will be taken in during the winter. This new policy, which makes good economic sense, will cause boaters some inconvenience: most docks cannot be installed each spring until road weight limits have been lifted and the heavy machinery required for installation can move about. That said, there will still be access to the flowage early each season, as the more easily moved Fisherman’s Landing dock and the handicapped dock will be put in place as soon as the ice goes out. Brett also spent time dealing with the question of whether to extend motorized activities into the TFSWA. That issue fell short of resolution and has been postponed until the preparation of a new master plan for the flowage, which Brett has been told will take place no later than 2024.

Looking forward, Brett hopes the flowage can “retain its wild presence” as much as possible. He’s not a fan of motorized access to its property or other kinds of modernization. “I think there’s room for a place where, with a little effort, one can get away from electrical hookups.”

On November 11, 2019, Brett formally ended his work as property manager and shifted to his new role as informal adviser to his successor, Beth Feind.

Brett, the association thanks you for your dedicated work, and wishes you all the best.

Dam Dike Done

The fall/winter 2018 issue of Driftwood contained an article describing Xcel Energy’s work to upgrade dike 2a in the vicinity of Sportsman’s Landing. The accompanying photograph was dominated by a number of huge boulders that had been uncovered by an excavating machine. We are pleased to report that the boulders have been moved to the perimeter of the work area and that a new dike/road has been built and its surface blacktopped. Sportsman’s Landing is back in full operation.



Photo by Mike Hittle. *The enhanced dike, which doubles as Dam Road, holds back not the flowage, but surplus water from this fall’s rains.*



Meet Beth Feind, New Property Manager of the TFSWA

By Mike Hittle

On November 11, 2019, Beth Feind climbed the narrow staircase in the Mercer Ranger Station and headed for her new office, that of property manager of the TFSWA. Neither the cold weather—it had been near zero in that morning—nor the signs that plastic had once been taped over the leaky office window, nor the bulging file cabinet seemed to phase her. As someone familiar with the old CCC facilities at the Trout Lake Forestry Headquarters, her Mercer office was just another charming piece of northwoods history.

By her own admission, Beth is someone who had come “up north” on purpose—initially to study at Nicolet Area Technical College (“there were tall pines on the campus”) and then to begin her career in natural resources. She began working for the WDNR in 2010 as limited term employee doing trail labor during the summers of 2010 and 2011. Following that introduction to the agency, she was a WDNR customer service representative in Woodruff from 2011-2018, at which point she became a park ranger, only to apply, successfully, for the open position at the TFSWA.

Beth’s avocations fit perfectly with her day job. She likes camping, fishing, and recreational canoeing—all of which can be conveniently undertaken on a nearby 13,000 plus acre body of water. Indeed, when she informed one of her daughters of the opportunity to camp on one of the flowage’s islands, her daughter exclaimed, “you mean no neighbors?”



Photo by Mike Hittle

It is obviously too soon for Beth to have worked up specific agenda items that will guide her work as property manager, but one can get a sense of her overall view of the job from reading Randy Schubert’s President’s Letter in this issue of Driftwood. It comes as no surprise, given the activities that draw her to the outdoors, that maintaining the flowage in as pristine a state as possible is at the top of Beth’s list of priorities.

Intercepting Invasives

By Zach Wilson

Greetings and Happy Early Winter from the Iron County Land and Water Conservation Department. Thanks in big part to a great summer staff, I’m happy to report that we educated 2854 people about the threat of aquatic invasive species and inspected 1252 boats on the flowage. Our summer staff spent 492 hours at various boat landings around the Turtle-Flambeau Flowage and Trude Lake. The good news is that we did not find any new aquatic invasive species. We did find the usual suspects: purple loosestrife, aquatic forget-me-nots, and banded and Chinese mystery snails. Besides purple loosestrife the forget-me-nots and the snails both have well established populations throughout the county and have not been a species we manage. The snails are found in many waterbodies throughout the state.

Each season our summer limited term employee staff join a statewide effort called Clean Boats Clean Waters and collect data at the landings which helps us understand the invasive species threat. This year we decided to look at the data for one of the questions that was asked of all watercraft owners when entering or exiting the flowage: “Was the watercraft used on another body of water within five days prior to coming to the Turtle-Flambeau Flowage/Trude Lake?” Five days is the interval of time researchers believe that an organism can remain viable and possibly infest a new waterbody. We recommend that prior to visiting other lakes, boaters should, clean, drain, and dry their boats and not enter a different body of water for at least five days.

Our data tell an interesting story about where a threat is likely to come from, and therefore allow us to do extra screening on boats entering from an infested lake. Data collected in 2018-2019 show that the flowage has visitors from all around the state. We identified the counties where boaters had previously recreated. Not surprisingly, most flowage visitors who had been to other lakes within the last five days came from counties bordering Iron County. However, there were also visitors from many other, more distant counties such as Dodge, Racine, Jefferson, Sheboygan, Fond Du Lac, Winnebago, Portage, and Marathon. And some of these visitors had boated on over four different lakes within the prior five days. What this all means is that there is a constant danger that a boat or trailer will be carrying an invasive species and introduce it to the flowage.

Lake Winnebago is a 132,000-acre lake found in Fond du Lac, Winnebago, and Calumet Counties. This mecca for walleye

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The Times They Are A-Changing

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airport where there are no planes.” The same website also contained extensive coverage of the views of Jeff Wilson, a retired WDNR wildlife technician at Mercer. “Wilson said he reached out to fellow retired DNR biologists and fisheries staff and to members of Iron County Lakes and River Alliance, Gile Lake Association, and the Turtle-Flambeau Flowage Association. There was strong support for the idea that as a conservation agency the fisheries staff should be closer to the resources they work with on a daily basis.”

This pushback was not without its effect. Two weeks later the Daily Globe website reported that the WDNR “will delay reassigning fisheries staff to Ashland by a year.” According to Scott Loomans, division administrator for the Fish, Wildlife and Parks program of the WDNR office in Madison: “We’ve heard some of the concerns in the community. We’re slowing down the timeline of the move and that would not be happening before the summer of 2020.”

This statement, however, leaves a couple of loose ends. It is not clear whether this delay will open the door to a serious reconsideration of the planned move, or whether it is simply a means to acknowledge local people’s views and an opportunity to try to convince them of the merits of an action already decided on. Moreover, the term “next summer” is vague: no date or month is mentioned, leaving those affected without a clear sense of when the matter will be brought to closure. As for the interim, Mike Vogelsang, the fishery supervisor, reports that the following staffing arrangements are in place: Zach Lawson is working out of the Ashland office two days a week and the Mercer office three days. Technicians Folstad and Zarzycki are working out of Mercer only.

Stay tuned to “next summer.”

Charismatic Critters: Part Two

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threatened species, and North Dakota followed in 1991. A population established itself in the Black Hills of South Dakota (a strong-hold for the cougar during the extirpation era) and in the Badlands of North Dakota. By 2005 this population had grown to a level where North and South Dakota opened their first regulated cougar hunt.

When cougar populations are high, young cougars disperse from within their range. Only half of females tend to disperse and will typically stay near their home territory.

Conversely, males travel further, with one Dakota male having been documented moving all the way to Connecticut. The different dispersal movement between the sexes favors the harvest of dispersing females as they stay near the core population year after year where hunting pressure may be higher. Dispersing males may be harvested throughout the Dakotas, but a few make it to Minnesota and Wisconsin and beyond in search of a female.

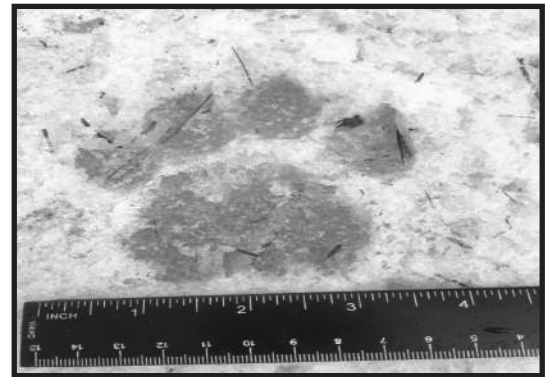
Female cougars are the limiting factor for a breeding population. The closest known breeding population is over 600 miles away from Wisconsin. Since females tend to disperse relatively short distances, it’s unlikely a dispersing male will find a female in Wisconsin to start a breeding population. And since Minnesota has yet to identify a female in their state, we may have to wait awhile.

To learn more about cougars in Wisconsin and see the photos of the seven confirmed observations this year, go to <https://dnr.wi.gov/topic/wildlifehabitat/cougar.html>.

2019-2021 CWD Surveillance Areas

REMINDER: The DNR is testing deer across the north to survey for CWD, and we need your help. Self-serving kiosks and other sampling stations are available to the public and are posted to the DNR website: <https://dnr.wi.gov/wmcwd/RegStation/Search>. Samples can be taken weeks after the deer is harvested if the head is frozen, so please contact me or drop off a head at one of the stations to get it sampled.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention states that to date, there have been no reported cases of CWD infection in people. Nonetheless, as a precaution, the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) recommends that people only consume venison from healthy-appearing deer with test results indicating that CWD was not detected.



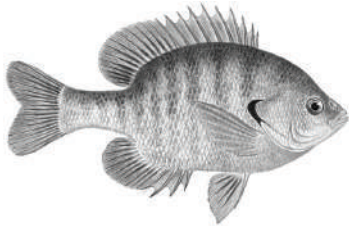
Tracks of confirmed cougar in Minocqua. 4/3/19



Flowage Fishery Research Update

[The following is a slightly edited version of a communication from Zach Lawson, Fisheries Biologist WDNR, and Jim Kohl, association board member and head of the fish management committee]

- The smallmouth bass population remains high, but there have been changes in the size structure of that population. A good number of the really large fish have died out through natural causes. They have been replaced, however, by some good year classes, with a good slug of fish less than 12 inches in length coming on. These data are consistent with a natural senescence cycle. The data also suggest that there may be an uptick in three or four years in the numbers of larger fish—17 inches and more. At this point there do not appear to be any noticeable consequences of changes in regulations. These data will be subject to further refinement, but my time on the water—and that of guides and other anglers—seems to corroborate the hypothesis laid out above.



- The panfishery looks good. Very nice gills are available and some good year classes are coming up. However, recent walleye year classes may have kept juvenile panfish production from getting out of control during the last one to three years. More data on panfish will become available during the winter.

- Sturgeon look good. Catch rates were about average; there were plenty of adults; and it was encouraging to see some young fish coming up. We were also able to deploy an array of receivers around Benson Lake, angle 15 individuals, and sonic tag those individuals. They have been monitored from September to November. Thus far it appears that there was zero hooking mortality from angling for these individuals. This outcome is encouraging (although more detailed analyses are to come), and will provide pertinent support for potential future regulation changes (if we wish to pursue a catch and release season).

- From the data on walleyes that we have collected so far (we completed this as a “joint survey” with GLIFWC), it looks like we had an above average year class this year and an above average crop of yearlings (left from last year). Bear in mind, please, that these data are only from our portion, or ½ of the survey. Nevertheless, the data shouldn’t change much when the other half is figured in, as I have heard that GLIFWC crews saw something similar to what we saw. We will know more specifics when we exchange data in the winter, but right now it looks really good. Thankfully, our new regulation is going into effect next spring and should protect all these fish, as well as many of the fish from the 2017 year class. The future looks good, but as I’ve said before, things might still get a bit worse before it starts getting better (although we should start rounding the corner here very soon if we aren’t already).



- We stocked 1500 muskies this year. We had been planning to reduce the quota a bit this year (down to 2800 as per our genetics stocking calibration work), but low hatchery production reduced it by almost 50%. All those few in numbers, the guys we stocked were mighty (a 12 inch average length) and feisty. The flowage musky population continues to have strong densities and a good size structure.



Flowage and Iron County Participates in Wisconsin's 2015-2019 Breeding Bird Atlas (BBA2)

Bruce Bacon – Iron County BBA Coordinator

The largest wildlife survey ever in Wisconsin has just finished its fifth and final field season. Birds were surveyed in every county, mostly by volunteers. The WDNR and Wisconsin Society for Ornithology were the main sponsors. The entire state was divided into 3 mile X 3 mile blocks and every 6th block was a priority block to be surveyed. So 1/6 of Wisconsin's land was to be surveyed! Additional specialty blocks within which there was some unique habitat were also surveyed. The goal was to document the presence of bird species during the breeding season and if possible to confirm breeding activity by species within surveyed blocks. This information will be compared to similar data collected in 1995-1999's (BBA1) and to look for changes in bird distribution and breeding. Data checking is occurring now; with electronic and written results will become available in the next year or two. I will summarize the preliminary data for Iron County in this article.

The 1995-1999 BBA used paper data sheets and data were entered by the central office. The latest Wisconsin BBA used eBird (www.ebird.com) and was the first such survey in the U.S. to do so. Surveyors entered their own data in real time, so the data are available in raw form already and summaries will be easier and faster. Determining the presence of a species during the time period it could be breeding was much easier than actually confirming a species is currently breeding here. Hearing a singing male is a common and relatively easy way to determine their presence. It is nearly impossible to find songbird nests, so to confirm breeding we had to see adults defending territories, carrying nest material or food, or observe newly fledged young or other breeding activities. I helped by catching and banding birds which allowed us to look for incubation and brood patches (bare spots on the breast) or cloacal protuberances in adults (use your imagination), or identifying young of the year, all signs of breeding.



Black Tern nest, a Wisconsin state threatened species that nests on the flowage.

Flowage Blocks

The Turtle Flambeau Flowage (TFF) is covered by 7 of the blocks, 2 of which were priority blocks that received dedicated efforts to survey for breeding birds. The TFF-CE block includes the Springstead Landing area and west Horseshoe; and Wilson Lake-CW covered Horseshoe east and the Murray's Landing area. These were the 2 priority blocks. Limited data was collected in the other 5 blocks. Because these 7 blocks also include non-TFF property, their bird lists possibly include some (few?) birds not found within the TFF boundary proper. Wilson Lake-CW went from 88 to 85 species observed and from 36 to 41 species confirmed as breeding (1995-99 to 2015-19). TFF-CE went from 79 to 78 species observed and from 32 to 39 species confirmed as breeding. This would seem to indicate similar numbers of bird species present over the last 20 years. The increase in confirmed breeders is very likely due to increased effort. It makes sense that most birds present during the breeding season are actually breeding. Using science (surveys) to document that was difficult.

Iron County Overall

Iron County's summary and comparison to the previous BBA is the best way to get a picture of what is happening with our local birds, including those using the TFF. Some of the differences are due to much better coverage in 2015-2019 than the earlier BBA. Iron County also had several paid atlasers (surveyors) in 2015-2019 and these birders tend to be better at detecting birds than the average volunteer birder.

For Iron County, BBA1 had only 9 individuals submit data (they may well have had help gathering data) and BBA2 had 42 individuals turn in data via ebird. Iron County has 101 blocks (3 mile X 3 mile) with 24 called priority blocks in each atlas. In BBA1 data were gathered from 57 (56%) of blocks and only 18 (75%) priority blocks. For BBA2 we gathered data in 89 (88%) of blocks and all 24 (100%) priority blocks. This is a result of increased effort including more paid "professional" atlasers. In BBA1 only 2 birders confirmed more than 40 species as breeders in Iron county and in BBA2 seven birders confirmed more than 40 species as breeders (1 individual had 92 and another 86). With that increased effort we only went from 151 total species reported (BBA1) to 154 species (BBA2) and 144 species (BBA1) to 146 species (BBA2) found in priority blocks. The number of bird species which breed in Iron County appears stable.

Some species have increased in their distribution and abundance as they were found in more blocks in the 2nd atlas. Trumpeter swans have expanded their breeding in Iron County. Some of the "new" confirmed breeders in the last 20 years



from BBA data are: wild turkeys, blue-winged teal, ring-necked ducks (probably a breeder that was missed in BBA1), yellow-billed cuckoo, Wilson's snipe (common, so likely breeding in BBA1 but not confirmed), spotted sandpiper (see snipe comments), turkey vulture, red-tailed hawk, red-headed woodpecker, red-bellied woodpecker, blue-headed vireo, boreal chickadee (difficult to find and likely breeding in BBA1), brown thrasher, savannah sparrow, bobolink, Baltimore oriole, northern waterthrush, golden-winged warbler, northern cardinal and dickcissel. Some species were found breeding in both time periods but are obviously increasing; Canada geese, sandhill cranes, belted kingfishers, flickers, red-eyed vireos, golden-crowned kinglets, red-breasted nuthatches, starlings, gray catbirds, eastern bluebirds, hermit thrushes, cedar waxwings, common grackles, ovenbirds, black-throated blue warblers and Canada warblers. The increasing species reflect regional trends but are also influenced by the increased survey effort and talent in BBA2.

Some birds have become more difficult to find in the 20 years after BBA1 and were not confirmed in BBA2. These include: purple martin, Canada jays, evening grosbeaks, yellow-headed blackbirds, and Connecticut warblers. Across their breeding range these species are declining and our data reflected so. We are far enough south for some species to be expected as rare breeders only, including juncos and field sparrows which were found in BBA1 but not BBA2. Oddities like these probably do not reflect changes in numbers or habitat.

At some point this BBA bird data may be looked at in relation to climate change and/or habitat changes. There likely will be some correlations like the warming climate causing more southerly birds like red-headed and red-bellied woodpeckers breeding farther north. Maybe we are losing Canada jays because it is too warm? Obviously local habitat changes annually through logging, development, and weather trends, but it appears county-wide it may not be impacting breeding birds at this time.

As the Iron County BBA2 coordinator I greatly appreciate the efforts of the volunteer (and paid) birders who collected Iron County's breeding bird data. It was fun getting out there trying to get up close and personal with our local birds but also a lot of work. THANKS! And in 20 years we will be doing it again!

Intercepting Invasives

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and sturgeon fishermen is also a posterchild for invasives you do not want in your lake: Asiatic clam, curly-leaf pondweed, Eurasian water-milfoil, faucet snail, flowering rush, phragmites, and zebra mussels to name a few. Data collected by our Clean Boats Clean Waters staff show that in 2018-2019 four boaters traveled from Lake Winnebago to the Flowage within the five-day window of species viability. Knowing this, we made sure that these boats were invasive free before they were launched into flowage waters. Cleaning your watercraft before entering ANY waterbody is a good idea. Prevention beats eradication.

The threat of invasive species continues to be on our radar and with help from partners like Excel, WDNR, UW Extension, and the Turtle-Flambeau Flowage Trude Lake Property Owners' Association, hopefully we can keep these invaders out of our county and our beautiful Turtle-Flambeau Flowage and Trude Lake.

If you have any questions about water quality, invasive species, or if you want a consultation on protecting your shoreline from erosion, feel free to give us a call.

Zach Wilson, Iron County Land and Water Conservation Specialist.

715-561-2234, zach@ironcountywi.org

THE DNR NEEDS YOU!

Once again this year the WDNR is looking for volunteers to take part in a sturgeon monitoring program on the Manitowish River. The task is simple: spend one to three hours observing the riffles just below the point where the river passes under Highway 51. (The new bike-trail bridge provides an excellent vantage point for this project.) While at the site, volunteers take the water temperature, keep records of any interesting natural phenomena, and, most importantly, keep an eye out for sturgeon. If volunteers observe sturgeon, they are to immediately contact the WDNR so that fisheries personnel can get to the site promptly to capture the fish and carry out their study. Knowledge of sturgeon behavior in the river will be a factor in determining whether to initiate a catch and release sturgeon season in the flowage.

If you would like to volunteer for one or more days from mid-April to late May, contact Zach Lawson, fisheries biologist. (715) 476-7847 or Zachary.Lawson@wisconsin.gov



P.S. I spent two relaxed mornings on the river last year; no sturgeon showed up, but the red horse arrived the second day in staggering numbers on their spring spawning run. And mergansers put on a high-speed aerial display that rivaled the Air Force Thunderbirds. M.H.



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Driftwood

The newsletter of the Turtle Flanbeau Flowage
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— *Mission Statement* —

The purpose of the Association is to maintain, protect and enhance the quality of the lake and its surroundings for the collective interest of members and the general public.

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If you would like to contact the Association electronically, please visit our website
www.tfftl.org and search under "CONTACT US"

